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Navy Employee Is Honored For Counterespionage Role

WASHINGTON, June 22 (AP) — A civilian employee of the Navy was honored Thursday for his role in a counter-intelligence operation that led to the arrest of an East German spy in 1983.

The employee, William Henderson Tanner Jr., was given a plaque and a letter of appreciation from William H. Webster Jr., director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, which conducted the operation with the Navy.

He also received the Distinguished Civilian Service Award from Under Secretary James F. Goodrich of the Navy.

Mr. Tanner, 44 years old, works for the Naval Electronics Systems Engineering Center in Charleston, S.C.

For about two years beginning in late 1981, Mr. Tanner voluntarily served as a double agent in an operation directed against the East German intelligence service, the bureau said.

The F.B.I. said the operation resulted in the arrest of Alfred Zehe, an East German exchange professor, on Nov. 30, 1983, in Boston. Mr. Zehe pleaded guilty on Feb. 21 to eight counts of espionage.

On June 11, Mr. Zehe was released to the East German Government as part of a prisoner exchange negotiated between the United States and East Germany.